



**Montana Department of
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY**

EXHIBIT 5
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HB 401

Brian Schweitzer, Governor

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**HB 401
Department of Environmental Quality Informational Testimony
House Natural Resources Committee
February 14, 2007**

The Department of Environmental Quality is the state agency that administers the Montana's Water and Wastewater Treatment Plant Operators Act. Currently, the statute only requires certified operators in responsible charge of water treatment, water distribution, and wastewater treatment facilities.

This legislation would add the requirement for certified operators in responsible charge for all Community public wastewater systems serving over 3,300 in population. The Department estimates that 30 Community wastewater systems will be required to have a certified collection system operator. Large communities in Montana employ staff to monitor and maintain the collection portion of the wastewater systems; however they are not currently certified. These individuals and others have indicated that they would like a certification program developed specifically for their field.

In addition, the Department would add language to allow for a voluntary certification of wastewater collection system operators for all level systems in Montana. The voluntary program would be administered the same as the non-voluntary requirement and would require passing an initial test, annual renew, and continuing education.

The benefits of having properly certified and trained operators for wastewater collection system would increase public health protection and assist wastewater systems in meeting permit requirements established to protect the environment. These folks would be required to pass a proficiency test and renew their certification annually. Every two years they would be required to obtain continuing education credits. The certification would recognize these operators as professionals in their field and would require training to ensure their safety and the safety of others is stressed.

This is not a new approach and nationally other state certification programs have already begun certifying wastewater collection system operators. By developing a program in Montana it would aid in maintaining the expensive collection system infrastructure and allow reciprocity of certified operators between Montana and other states. The Governor appointed Water and Wastewater Operator Certification Advisory Council has reviewed and suggested that we continue to pursue the proposal.